

TWO-LEVEL PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL PROGRAM

1. PURPOSE

This Directive revises the 2-level performance appraisal program, also known as a “pass/fail” system, for the employees of certain covered Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) organizations. In this appraisal program, two summary levels are used to rate overall performance, and two performance levels also are used to rate individual performance elements. Other Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) organizations are covered by different performance appraisal programs.

This appraisal program was requested by the organizations it covers, and has been approved by the Department’s Office of Human Resources Management.

2. REPLACEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

This Directive replaces APHIS Directive 4430.1, Two-Level Performance Appraisal Program, dated 10/1/99. There are no changes to the mechanics of the rating system itself. The key changes are:

- a. Adding Veterinary Services (VS) to the programs covered by the system, effective January 1, 2002.
- b. Establishing a uniform minimum appraisal period of 90 days.
- c. Updating the coverage chart reflecting organizational changes.
- d. Adding a glossary and a section on records and retention.

3. AUTHORITIES

This 2-level appraisal program is authorized by, and meets the requirements of:

- a. Title 5, United States Code, Chapter 43.
- b. Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 430.

- c. U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Performance Management System, as approved by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on January 31, 1996, and the Secretary of Agriculture on June 12, 1996.

4. **COVERAGE, EFFECTIVE DATE, AND MINIMUM APPRAISAL PERIOD**

a. Coverage.

This 2-level performance appraisal program applies to all APHIS employees in the following programs, except those excluded by law, regulation, or an administrative determination by OPM:

- Animal Care
- International Services
- Legislative and Public Affairs (except the Director)
- MRP Business Services
- Veterinary Services
- Wildlife Services

All permanent full-time and part-time GS, GM, and wage system employees are covered. The primary exclusions are excepted service employees (Schedules A, B, and C) who are not expected to work for at least 120 days in a 12-month period, Foreign Service personnel (pay plans FP and FE), and members of the Senior Executive Service.

b. Effective Date.

This performance appraisal program is effective on the first annual rating cycle beginning on or after October 1, 2001.

c. Minimum Appraisal Period.

The minimum appraisal period is 90 calendar days. An employee may not be given a rating of record unless he/she has worked under a written performance plan for at least 90 days.

5. **GLOSSARY**

Terms in **bold** are defined in OPM regulations, 5 CFR, Part 430 (2001).

- a. Advisory rating. A performance rating that covers part of the appraisal period, such as for a detail or temporary promotion that lasts at least 90 days. An advisory rating is not, in itself, a rating of record, but is considered by the rating official when the rating of record is prepared.

- b. **Appraisal**. The process under which an employee's performance is reviewed and evaluated.
- c. **Appraisal period**. The established period of time, normally 12 months, for which an employee's performance will be reviewed and for which a final rating of record will be prepared.
- d. **Appraisal program**. The specific requirements and procedures established under the policies and parameters of the Department's appraisal system.
- e. **Appraisal system**. The Department's OPM-approved framework of umbrella policies and parameters established for the administration of performance appraisal programs in USDA.
- f. **Critical element**. A work assignment or responsibility of such importance that unacceptable performance on the element would result in a determination that an employee's overall performance is unacceptable. **In this 2-level performance appraisal system, all performance elements will be critical elements.**
- g. **Element rating**. The level of performance on each individual element determined by comparing accomplishments to the performance standard.
- h. **Inability to rate**. The situation that occurs when a rating of record is due, but the employee has not had the opportunity to perform under a performance plan for at least 90 days, the minimum rating period.
- i. **Minimum rating period**. The minimum period of performance (90 days) under a properly signed and approved performance plan that must be completed before a performance rating may be prepared.
- j. **Noncritical element**. A dimension or aspect of individual, team, or organizational performance, exclusive of a critical element, that is used in assigning a summary level. Such elements may include, but are not limited to, objectives, goals, program plans, work plans, and other means of expressing expected performance. **Non-critical elements may not be used in this 2-level performance appraisal program.**
- k. **Performance**. Accomplishment of work assignments or responsibilities.
- l. **Performance plan**. All of the written performance elements and standards that set forth expected performance. A plan must include all critical elements and non-critical elements (if non-critical elements are used) and their performance standards.
- m. **Performance standard**. The management-approved expression of the performance thresholds, requirements, results, or expectations that must be met to

be appraised at a particular level of performance. A performance standard may include, but is not limited to, indicators of quality, quantity, timeliness, and manner of performance.

- n. Progress review. Communication between the supervisor and employee about performance compared to the performance standards of critical elements.
- o. Rating official. The individual who is responsible for informing the employee of the performance elements of his/her position, establishing performance standards for those elements, evaluating performance and assigning the performance rating. The rating official generally is the first level supervisor or a team leader.
- p. **Rating of record**. The performance rating and assignment of a summary rating level prepared either at the end of an appraisal period for performance of duties over the entire period and the assignment of a summary rating level, OR, when needed to make the rating of record consistent with a determination to grant or withhold a within-grade increase.
- q. Reviewing official. The higher level official who must concur with the rating official's determination that an employee's performance is "unacceptable," before the "unacceptable" rating is issued to the employee. Deputy Administrators have the option of requiring that a designated reviewing official review performance plans before they are put in place, and/or review all ratings of record before they are issued.
- r. Summary level. The adjective, Fully Successful or Unacceptable, indicator that equates to the overall level of performance based on the appraisal of each performance element.

6. POLICY

- a. It is APHIS policy to operate a performance appraisal program in a manner which is consistent with applicable statutes, regulations, and the principles and objectives of the USDA system.
- b. The Administrator and delegated managers may initiate new performance appraisal programs, changes in program coverage, and changes to the specific procedures and requirements of this performance appraisal program for their organizations, within the parameters of the USDA system. These include:
 - (1) The starting and ending dates of the annual appraisal cycle,
 - (2) The minimum rating period,
 - (3) How many and which performance levels will be used to appraise performance elements,

- (4) The summary level pattern, and
- (5) The method for deriving and assigning the summary level for the rating of record.

Departmental approval is required before new programs, changes in program coverage, or changes in items (2) through (5) above, can be implemented.

- c. The success of performance appraisal programs will be measured by the extent to which they:
 - (1) Support the Department's missions and customer service philosophy;
 - (2) Support and adhere to the Department's civil rights and diversity policies, recognize civil rights and diversity accomplishments, and improve management of a diverse workforce;
 - (3) Align individual and team performance expectations with organizational strategic plans, including performance goals and objectives;
 - (4) Provide for employee performance evaluation which focuses on results and objective measures of performance;
 - (5) Provide for employee involvement in the performance appraisal process;
 - (6) Use the appraisal process as a tool to improve continuous two-way communication of organizational, team, and employee performance objectives and accomplishments;
 - (7) Improve organizational, team, and individual performance;
 - (8) Reward organizational, team, and individual performance through traditional and innovative uses of recognition;
 - (9) Promote the use of streamlining techniques such as automation and paperwork reduction to make the performance appraisal process more efficient.
- d. The provisions of this performance appraisal program will be communicated to all covered employees through discussions between supervisors and employees, training, and/or orientation and informational materials, when appropriate.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. Employees will:

- (1) Participate with the rating official in developing elements and standards for the annual performance plan;
- (2) Ensure they have a clear understanding of their performance expectations, and request clarification, as necessary;
- (3) Manage performance to achieve identified goals and expected results;
- (4) Seek frequent feedback from the rating official;
- (5) Take steps to improve aspects of performance that are identified as not meeting expectations or otherwise needing improvement.

b. Rating officials (first-line supervisors or other officials with authority to issue performance plans and assign ratings of record) will:

- (1) Develop performance elements and standards, with employee input, and document them in the written annual performance plan.
- (2) Monitor employee performance during the appraisal period and communicate with employees regularly about their performance.
- (3) Conduct at least one mid-term performance progress review with each employee.
- (4) Assist employees in improving performance, and work more closely with any employee whose performance is identified as not meeting expectations or otherwise needing improvement.
- (5) Appraise each employee's performance at the end of the appraisal cycle (or at other times when a rating of record is required), conduct an end-of-year performance review, and issue the annual rating of record.
- (6) Take appropriate action for employees whose performance does not meet expectations; and recognize employees, as appropriate, for successful performance.
- (7) Forward a copy of ratings of record, through administrative channels as appropriate, to the servicing personnel office for entry in the National Finance Center's personnel database.

- c. Reviewing officials will review and approve the rating of record for any employee whose performance is rated unacceptable.
- d. The Director, MRP Human Resources Division, will:
 - (1) Design performance appraisal programs at the direction of the Administrator;
 - (2) Obtain Departmental approval, when required by Departmental policy, for new performance appraisal programs and for changes in program procedures, requirements, or coverage;
 - (3) Make informational materials and operating guidance available to supervisors and employees; and
 - (4) Periodically evaluate the effectiveness of performance appraisal programs.

8. REQUIREMENTS

- a. Annual Appraisal Period. In most cases, the appraisal cycle will cover a 12-month period, and each employee will receive an annual rating of record at the end of the cycle. The Administrator or delegated manager sets the beginning and ending dates of the annual appraisal period. If these dates are changed, affected employees will be notified in writing. The following rating cycles are in effect:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• International Services• Legislative and Public Affairs (all employees except the Director)• Wildlife Services	October 1 through September 30
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MRP Business Services	November 1, 2001 through June 30, 2002. Thereafter, July 1, 2002 through June 30 (effective July 1, 2002)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Veterinary Services	January 1 through December 31 (effective January 1, 2002)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Animal Care	May 1 through April 30

- b. Establishing Performance Plans. A written performance plan will be provided to each covered employee at the beginning of each appraisal period (normally within 30 days). The performance plan includes the dates of the appraisal period, and performance elements and standards. Performance plans are recorded on forms MPR 102A and B, Performance Plan, and Continuation Sheet.

- (1) Performance Elements.
 - (a) Each performance plan will include at least one critical element based on the employee's work assignments and responsibilities. If appropriate, individual contributions to team or unit performance may be covered. Weighting of elements is not an issue in a 2-level performance appraisal program.
 - (b) Equal Opportunity/Civil Rights Content. As required by Departmental policy, all supervisors will have a separate critical element on equal opportunity/civil rights. For nonsupervisory employees, performance expectations for civil rights will be included in a critical performance element, but it need not be a stand-alone element.
 - (c) Non-critical elements will not be used.
- (2) Performance Standards. Performance in each element is rated at one of two levels, "fully successful," or "unacceptable." For each element, the performance standard must be written at the "fully successful" level. The absence of a written standard at the "unacceptable" level will not preclude the assignment of an element rating at that level.
 - (a) The "fully successful" level generally describes the performance of a solid, effective employee whose work meets, or somewhat exceeds, normal expectations in terms of quantity, quality, timeliness, and customer service. Some indicators of performance at this level are:
 - 1 The employee almost always completes work on schedule and demonstrates a sound balance between quality and quantity.
 - 2 The employee prioritizes assignments, works efficiently, and requires only normal supervision and followup.
 - 3 Work products consistently meet applicable instructions, specifications, and goals, and meet customer needs. Errors are minimal and seldom repeated.
 - (b) The "unacceptable" level is described as performance which fails to meet the performance standards at the "fully successful" level.
- (3) Employees are encouraged to participate in the development of performance elements and standards, to review them at least annually, and to make suggestions for changes.
- (4) Changes to Performance Plans. A new or revised performance plan will be issued, as necessary, if an employee is assigned to a different position, or if

his/her major duties or responsibilities change during the appraisal period. This includes temporary changes in duties due to a detail or temporary promotion, if the temporary assignment is expected to last as long as 90 days. Changes to performance plans must be communicated in writing to the employee.

c. Monitoring Performance.

(1) Progress Reviews. During the appraisal period, at least one mid-term progress review will be conducted with each employee to discuss his/her performance compared to the performance plan.

(2) Unacceptable Performance.

(a) Performance Improvement Plan. If, at any time during the appraisal cycle, an employee's performance is determined to be "unacceptable" in one or more critical elements, the employee will be given a written performance improvement plan and an opportunity to demonstrate "fully successful" performance. The performance improvement plan will include:

- 1 Notice to the employee that his/her performance is unacceptable;
- 2 The element(s) in which performance is unacceptable;
- 3 What the employee must do to demonstrate acceptable performance;
- 4 The specific assistance that will be provided to help the employee;
- 5 The timeframe of the performance improvement period; and
- 6 The actions that may be initiated if the performance does not improve to the fully successful level.

(b) Failure to Demonstrate Fully Successful Performance. If the employee has not improved performance to the acceptable level during the opportunity period, action will be initiated to reassign, reduce in grade, or remove the employee.

(c) Savings Provision. Administrative actions initiated against employees whose performance is "unacceptable" under 5 U.S.C. 4303 and an approved Agency performance appraisal system in effect prior to the effective date of this program will continue to be

processed consistent with that preestablished set of procedures and requirements.

d. Rating Performance.

(1) Eligibility for Rating. To be eligible for a rating of record, an employee must have worked under a performance plan for at least the 90-day minimum rating period. If necessary, the appraisal period will be extended until the minimum rating period has been met before a rating of record is issued.

(2) Rating of Record.

(a) A written rating of record will be issued to each employee as soon as practicable after the end of the appraisal period, normally within 30 days. The rating of record consists of ratings for each element in the performance plan, and the assignment of a summary rating level. Ratings of record are recorded on form MRP 102, Performance Rating.

(b) Assignment of Element Ratings. The rating official will appraise the employee's performance against the performance standards for each element, and rate each element as "fully successful," or "unacceptable."

(c) Derivation and Assignment of Summary Rating Level. If all critical elements are rated "fully successful," the summary rating level is "fully successful."

If any element is rated "unacceptable," the summary rating level is "unacceptable."

(d) If an element is rated unacceptable," the rating official must prepare a written statement describing the employee's deficiencies in the element compared to the "fully successful" standard. An "unacceptable" rating of record must be reviewed and signed by a higher level official before it is issued to the employee.

(e) Consistency with Within-Grade Increase (WGI) Determinations. An employee must have a rating of record of "fully successful" to be granted a WGI. The rating of record must be "unacceptable" if the WGI is to be denied. When a decision to grant or withhold a WGI is inconsistent with the employee's most recent rating of record, a more current rating of record must be prepared and issued.

e. Advisory Ratings.

An employee may receive one or more advisory ratings during an appraisal cycle. Any advisory ratings received by an employee will be considered by the rating official when preparing a rating of record. An advisory rating is not, in itself, a rating of record.

- (1) Details and Temporary Promotions. An advisory rating will be prepared for any detail or temporary promotion which lasts as long as 90 days. The supervisor will document the employee's accomplishments and forward the information to the employee's permanent rating official.
- (2) Change of Position. If an employee has worked under a performance plan for at least 90 days, and then moves to a position with a different rating official, the losing rating official will prepare an advisory rating and forward it to the new rating official.

9. RECORDS AND RETENTION

- b. Employee Performance File. Official ratings of record and supporting materials (the annual performance plan and records of accomplishments) are retained in the Employee Performance File for 4 years.
- b. National Finance Center (NFC) Personnel Database. Rating of records must be forwarded to the servicing personnel office so that the summary rating of record can be entered into the NFC database and reported to OPM through the Civilian Personnel Data File.

10. PERFORMANCE BONUSES

Performance bonuses include the lump-sum cash performance award and the Quality Step Increase (QSI), which are intended to recognize and reward good performance throughout the rating cycle. To be eligible for a performance bonus under this 2-level performance appraisal program, an employee must receive at least a "fully successful" rating of record.

- a. Lump-Sum Performance Bonuses. A written justification is required to support a lump-sum performance award over \$500.
- b. QSIs. To initiate a QSI, the recommending supervisor must prepare a written justification that specifically describes:
 - (1) The expected work results of the employee;
 - (2) The actual results achieved and their linkage to established goals;
 - (3) How the employee substantially exceeded his/her performance standards and any specific work goals;

- (4) How the employee's performance was sustained at such a high level through the appraisal period.

11. INQUIRIES

- a. Inquiries on policy determinations, new performance appraisal programs, and changes in program procedures or coverage, and development or revision of performance plans should be referred to MRP Human Resources Division, Program Development.
- b. Inquiries on dealing with poor performance should be directed to the servicing Employee Relations Specialist.
- c. This Directive is available on the MRPHR homepage at ***www.aphis.usda.gov/mb/mrphr***, the Employee Library at ***www.aphis.usda.gov/library***.

/s/

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